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SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR SINGH, DORAN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: BROTHERHOOD RISING IN ALEXANDRIA

Classified By: CDA Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (U) This cable was prepared by the American Presence Post Alexandria.

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Summary  
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2. (C) The strong showing of Muslim Brotherhood candidates from Alexandria has provoked speculation that the group may see Egypt's second city as a launching point for broader political gains, in particular through greater representation on Alexandria's local (Governorate) council, due for elections in April 2006. Reaction among Alexandrians to the parliamentary results, wherein MB candidates in the city were successful in eight of the nine races in which they competed, has been generally relaxed except among Copts and some among the secular/liberal opposition parties (and NDP partisans) queried by APP Alexandria. Several contacts expect the movement to "flex its muscles" over the coming years in Alexandria and report deep concern about this possibility within the GOE. The appointment of a new governor from the ranks of the state security apparatus is expected before the end of the year. End summary.

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MB's Wide Power Base  
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3. (C) Muslim Brotherhood strength in Alexandria, Egypt's second city, was confirmed during the November parliamentary elections when MB candidates won eight of the nine races in which the party competed and for which returns are in. A further two MB candidates await run-offs for professional and worker seats in the disputed Manshiya district, delayed indefinitely after reports of irregularities during the second round. Should those seats go to the MB candidates - and both were ahead when the vote was suspended according to voting statistics released by the GOE -- it would be 10 for 11 in Alexandria (the city's total parliamentary representation is 22 seats).

4. (C) The Brotherhood's power in Alexandria has long been acknowledged, particularly in the city's bleak outer suburbs, crammed with new (and poor) arrivals from the northern Delta. In these portions of the city, the MB's charities have been at work for years providing health and other social services that centralized and inefficient GOE ministries have struggled to match. (Note: The GOE has only recently been able to deliver water to a number of these areas thanks to a major USAID-financed grant to the Alexandria General Water Authority.)

5. (C) However, the group's power in Alexandria goes beyond the poorer classes and newly-arrived immigrants. The MB's power bases have traditionally been within the city's professional syndicates (particularly the powerful doctors, lawyers and engineers unions), and among the teeming crowds of young university students, who number nearly 200,000 at the city's main government campus, Alexandria University. This position within the "educated" community, in particular the prestigious fields of engineering, law and medicine, gives the MB added cachet and authority. Yasir Zaki, a medical doctor and member of Alexandria's local council told APP Alexandria Principal Officer that many of the MB's leaders in Alexandria rose to prominence through campus activism in the 1970's following Sadat's relaxation of restrictions on the MB in order to provide a counterweight to leftist domination of student politics. Among the activists that benefited from this policy, said Zaki, was Dr. Ibrahim El Zafrani, prominent dermatologist, Head of the Doctor's syndicate in Alexandria, and a senior MB leader here. Zaki knew El Zafrani as a student, and describes him as not only a shrewd political activist, but as a capable and respected physician well known for his charitable activities.

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Next Stop, Town Hall?  
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6. (C) Zaki, a prominent member of Alexandria's elected local council, noted that soon after the parliamentary elections, he received what he took to be coordinated representations

from several MB-associated physician colleagues asking his opinion about the local council, prospects for the coming election, relative capabilities of individual members, etc. Zaki is convinced that the MB intends a vigorous campaign for local council seats during the elections scheduled for April 2006, but rumored to be delayed by the GOE for up to a year while electoral procedures are reformed. This prediction of MB interest in broadening its power was echoed by numerous other contacts of APP Alexandria, who believe that the MB views Alexandria as a city conducive to a consolidation of its power and opportunity to show its capabilities for governance.

17. (C) Such a prospect has caused deep concern among Alexandria's non-NDP secular political activists. An administrator at Alexandria University who was also a failed Wafd candidate for Parliament from the Manshiya district echoed to Alexandria PO concern that the MB will seek a strong showing in the local council, adding there was little to stand in their way. The Wafd party in Alexandria had been decimated by years of relentless GOE pressure on the secular opposition, he said, while the NDP was completely discredited. In his own case, the Wafd national party had refused financial support for his parliamentary campaign, while sympathetic private parties (e.g., wealthy businessmen) remain reluctant to contribute to the Wafd's efforts out of fear of reprisal, such as lost contracts or bureaucratic difficulties, from the GOE. While the MB raises money through quasi-religious activities and the NDP makes use of resources of the state and business interests seeking government favors, all others are prevented from effective participation, he lamented.

18. (C) This academic contact also predicted the MB would increase activities on the campus of Alexandria University, home to a student body of nearly 200,000. The movement would likely "flex its muscles" on campus in the coming years, he said, in addition to continuing its active off-campus recruitment programs. He described a well organized effort by the MB in cafes, barbershops, youth clubs and mosques surrounding the campus to seek out and recruit university students, particularly new arrivals from the rural governorates surrounding Alexandria. These efforts also include convincing young university women to adopt the higab, or head covering, to demonstrate adherence to "proper Islamic values."

19. (C) Overall, however, the reaction among Alexandrians to the MB's strong showing has been relaxed. The city is notoriously independent, but it has also become quite conservative over the decades. The MB was not viewed as particularly menacing in conversations with dozens of APP contacts over the weeks since the election. An Alexandria-based petroleum engineer and former NDP member of parliament who ran unsuccessfully in 2005 as an independent, said the NDP was so despised and out of touch with Alexandrians that most people welcomed the MB victory, even if they don't agree with the MB's ideas. He also noted that the MB's results were somewhat skewed due to low turnout among non-MB opposition voters, who stayed home out of apathy, while the MB whipped the NDP in its organization and voter registration efforts.

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Business Okay With the Brothers?  
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110. (C) While some of APP's Alexandria business contacts have expressed concern over a lack of clarity in the MB's economic views, particularly regarding banking and free trade, most of those queried noted the positive side to an effective opposition movement within the Egyptian political system, whatever its philosophy. Such a phenomenon would check the Government's excesses and likely put a brake on corruption and waste. Many of these contacts reflected the view that in the end the NDP's continued overwhelming majority will preserve the broader economic reform agenda, while several also doubt the MB would seek to reverse the GOE's economic reforms in order not to spook the Egyptian or international business communities in the coming period. Zaki, the physician with many contacts in the movement, told APP PO that the MB itself is heavily vested in the Alexandria economy, principally through land holdings in the north coast resort districts - which have shot up in value over the past several years -- and through "control" of the used car trade, among other areas. He said the MB is much more sophisticated than business interests sometimes give it credit for, and want to see employment gains and economic growth every bit as much as others. It is false to presume all wealthy Alexandria business persons were NDP loyalists or even secular in their leanings. As Alexandria has become more conservative and religious in recent years, so too have many of its successful businessmen.

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Copts/Liberal Intelligentsia Alarmed  
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11. (C) The glaring exception to the general acceptance of the vote in Alexandria is among Copts and many of the liberal intelligentsia associated with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Copts were already on edge prior to the election due to Christian-Muslim riots in the Muharram Bey neighborhood during Ramadan (October 2005), and those feelings were exacerbated by the widespread MB victory here. According a Coptic member of the Alexandria local council, many Copts are at least discussing the idea of emigration, a phenomenon he said reflects the increasing alienation many Christians feel in a society they see moving inexorably towards less tolerance and acceptance of Christian rights. Alexandria was once a city dominated by foreign, and largely Christian, communities that has seen stark changes since the revolution. He noted widespread anger among Copts with the NDP for what they see as a duplicitous campaign first to coax an endorsement for the President's reelection from Pope Shenuda, then an abandonment of Coptic candidates and issues in the parliamentary polls.

12. (C) Alarm is also evident in the views of many senior employees of the Library of Alexandria, or Bibliotheca Alexandrina, completed in 2002 and conceived as the inheritor of the famous library of antiquity located here, a center of extraordinary scientific, medical and intellectual discovery. The new Library, which projects studiously a "humanist" secular approach, has been challenged to fit into this increasingly conservative city, and has been the subject of harsh criticism among MB-affiliated members of the 2000-05 Parliament for, among other things, the lack of a mosque on Library grounds. The Library was also criticized by MB-affiliated groups for agreeing to remove copies of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" following intense international pressure (notably from the USG). Thus, it is no surprise that its administration would react poorly to a strengthening of the MB's political position in Alexandria. Several among the senior leadership expressed concern that the Library's already tenuous support in Cairo (it costs a bundle to run, in a cash-strapped country) may be further eroded as a result of the parliamentary vote.

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Send in The - New -- Governor?  
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13. (C) The GOE is rumored to be deeply concerned about the election results, which come on top of the Ramadan sectarian riots, another cause for alarm. Alexandria has been astir with rumors that its much-revered governor, Mohammad Abdel Salam Al Mahgoub, will be replaced in a broad government reshuffle before the end of the year. Al Mahgoub, a former General in the GOE State Security apparatus and former Governor of Ismailia, is viewed as a problem solver and innovator but not as a particularly loyal (NDP) party man. He is held responsible by the NDP for the failure of one of the NDP's high profile candidates, Alexandria University President Mohammad Abdellah, who lost to an independent candidate and wealthy contractor close to the Governor. Al Mahgoub is also viewed as having bungled the Muharram Bey violence and election day security arrangements, in which riots and fighting broke out between MB and NDP loyalists. The GOE is expected to replace Al-Mahgoub with a prominent figure with a background in the security services.

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Comment  
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14. (C) The MB's nearly perfect electoral record in Alexandria's recent parliamentary elections should, in one way, come as no surprise. The city has been trending conservative and religious for decades along with the rest of the country, but also due to capital flight, economic stagnation and increasing rural migration. The NDP is clearly discredited here, while the secular opposition parties are as weak as elsewhere in the country. With this resounding success at its back, the MB appears to be preparing for strong gains in the city's local council elections and to consolidate political power. That said, the election result may not be as revealing as it appears, since apathy and lack of belief in the fairness of the voting system kept many non-MB, non-NDP voters away from the polls. The MB commands an extremely disciplined following, and can be expected to repeat its success in local elections if held this year, but further down the line its support may level off as greater numbers of Alexandrians register and participate in the electoral process. However it works out, Alexandria is a city to watch both as a possible indicator of the MB's strength and political program, and in its relations with a broader public currently willing to give it a chance but not decidedly in its corner. End comment.